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MIKEY'S LETTERS TO ST. PETER

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MIKEY'S LETTERS

TO

SAINT PETER

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KNIGHT VALE
K. K. K. KATECHISM
TRIAL of the POPE

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CHAPTER I

Father Roux Comes

Most Honorable Saint Peter:

Vicegerent of God (Deceased)—

Dear Sir:

I'm writing to you because Aggie Roony, she's my sister that works at Snyder's on 4th Street. Aggie says, "Git to the boss with your tale of woe. Don't tell it to no 'would-be.' He couldn't give you no help if he wanted to, and wouldn't if he could. Git to the boss!" So I'm writing to you to put you next to His Riverance, Father Roux. Father won't do. He'd mike his angel grandma out of her wing feathers to sell fer relics, and if you don't keep your eye on him, he'll steal your gate receipts from under your nose. I don't know how business is with you these hard times, but if you git as much fer letting the dead into heaven as Father Roux does fer letting them out of pugatory, your job has safe-blowing skinned a mile, and if you don't watch, his Riverance will git into politics and first thing you know you'll be sweeping up trash

in the basement instead of taking tickets at the main entrance.

If I wuz yit going to Free School I wouldn't write you no letter because I'd know there wuzent no way of getting it to you. But since I've been to Parochial school I've learned miracles is easy as rolling off a log and taint no harder fer a letter to git up to heaven than fer the Virgin to come down to bring scapulars.

Us Rooney's wuz having tough enough luck when we wuz let alone by Father Roux. After he got next to Maw and took us back into the fold of the only True Church, we've had to pick fer our living like jaybirds, and take it from me, masses and absolutions and holy water and such other religious luxuries as takes the money don't fill the hole under a fellow's shirt when its aching for a square meal.

I don't know whether you ever heard of us Rooney's or not. We live on the fourth floor, back, in the second tenement from Alderman Mulginty's saloon, which is not called a saloon. There's Maw and Aggie and me and Bridget and Timmy and Pat and Kitty and Dennis and the baby and poor little Paddy and Nora what's dead.

Maw's the head cheese. Aggie comes next. Sometimes Aggie and Maw tie for first place. I come next. I'm the one what wuz going to Free School and got a flag fer walking like a soldier in a drill, one of these here red and white striped flags with blue and white stars. I don't know what kind of a flag you folks in Heaven flies on your Post-office, but if it beats this here "Stars and Stripes" I got, its a dinger. After me comes all the rest of us. And then Paw. Maw and Paw has a mix-up every Sunday. You ought to hear Maw jaw! Monday morning Paw hits the trail fer the docks and works all day. Then he's back fer the rest of the week at Mulginty's.

The first time we seen Father Roux Maw wuz at the tub. Maw takes in washing. When she seen who wuz at the door she cleaned off a chair. His Riverence asked if this wuz Rooney's. Maw told him it wuz. He asked if it wuz the home of Miss Agnes Rooney what works at Snyder's. Ma wtold him it wuz. Then he come in and the little Rooney's, what wuzent none of them dressed fer company, got in behind the stove and stared at him.

The first thing his eye lit on wuz my flag what I got in flag drill at Free School. "I'm slavin'

at the tub," Maw said, "to make Mikey into an American citizen. Free Schools is the salvation of the poor of us."

"Free Schools!" sez Father Roux like he wuz mad, "A daughter of the Catholic Church sending her child to Free School! Don't you know its forbidden?"

"Is it now fer shure?" says Maw. "Well, you see I hain't no good Catholic no more, no more. And no confession have I made fer these three year and before that my confessions wuzn't no good at all—at all."

"Do you know that mortal sin means hell fire?" Father Roux said still looking mad.

"Well," says Maw, "you see your Riv'rance we couldn't afford religion no more. It wuz howly wather or milk. We couldn't have both fer the childer. So I took the milk. It couldn't be masses fer the sowls of thim and shirts fer their backs so sez I, 'It's shirts may it be,' I did."

"Milk! Shirts! You choose comforts for the perishing body and neglect the never dying souls of your children. It is ever thus in an infidel country. Where Mother Church is at the head of affairs the interests of the never dying soul are of first consideration. You have grievously

sinned. You must make a good confession, receive absolution, do penance. Then will the arms of Mother Church be open to receive you back."

"And who's bin tellin' you I want to git back to me owld ways?" says Maw. "Indade and its stahayin' out I've decided to do, fer aside from the cost of kapin' up religion I'm savin' up a stipend to buy a divorce from that plague of a Rooney."

"Divorce! You a daughter of the Church talk of divorce. There is no such thing as divorce, and only infidels and heretics believe in it. There can be no divorce. The Church decrees it so."

"I'm agreein' with you, there ain't no such a thing, but Mrs. Flarity she got one whin Flarity wuz sent to jail and I'm just howlding back me own order fer another one like it till I get the price. Rooney, the lazy dawg ain't got no vocation but addin' to the size of the family and we don't need no more of that with me at the tub and the poor little brats howling fer milk and bread."

"You have a large family?" sez Father Roux casting his eye behind the stove."

"D'y want me to call thim out and let you

count thim?" says Maw. "Well, there's a plenty. There's Aggie and Mikey and Bridget and Timmy and Pat and Kitty and Dennie and the baby."

"Pleasing in the sight of Mother Church and all the holy saints and angels is a large family," says Father Roux.

"Mebbe the howly saints and angels likes a large family," Maw said, "but it ain't none of them that's standin' over the tub gettin' shirts fer their backs and fillin' fer their belly. Large family's is fine fer the rich but hard luck fer the poor. There's Timmy has fits and Kitty sore eyes and the baby hasn't never got enough strength in his bones to sthand alone. They come too fast, your Riv'rance, and its got to be sthopped. 'What's the use,' I sez to that owld fool Rooney, 'in bringin' more into the world to shiver and whine fer a time and then die like my poor little Paddy and Nora did what's dead?"

"You have lost two children?" says Father, interested like.

"Two—poor blessed lambs. They died, they did, fer lack of milk and care."

"Had they been baptized?"

"Shure they had, your Rev'rance."

"And did you give them a Christian burial?"

"Faith and the putting of them away wuz the hardest blow of im all. It wuz when I wuz in bed with Dennie, the seventh of the Rooneys what got here when the poor things wuz taken away and buried with never so much as a candle fer its broke we wuz and not a priest would come. Poor things!"

"Poor things! Well may you say 'poor things' for with their mother's soul in jeopardy and them no Christian burial or consecrated ground to sleep in, their souls are suffering in purgatory. It is an awful sin, daughter, to bring children into the world to people hell. Think of their suffering through endless eternity! Pity should move a heart of stone to think of the agony of these helpless babes!"

"Poor things! Poor things!" said Maw, her voice getting husky.

Then the Holy Father seeing he's touched a soft spot in Maw, settled down to business like a fly boring a sore. And he bored and bored talking about hell fire and innocent babes kicking in its red hot flames till he got Maw in tears. Maw don't often come to tears. Mostly she uses her fists. But when shoe does get started her tears run by the bucketful.

When Ris Riverence had worked Maw's first tender place dry, he lit a fresh. This time it wuz about Aggie he got next to Maw. He told her what awful temptations wuz after good looking girls like our Aggie and what snares wuz set to ketch their innocent feet and how bad men wuz after them at every turn in the road waiting to carry them off an ruin them. He told Maw a girl needed a spiritual adviser and when he found out that Aggie hadn't never been to confessional, he said to send her to him and she couldn't get there none too quick. He said he'd look after her and see that she wuz protected against the villains what wuz watching for young girls.

Before he left he had worked Maw into a promise to send Aggie to confessional, to take me out of Free School and put me in Parochial, to put scapulars on the Rooney's down to the last one, and he told her he'd be back next day with an image of the Blessed Lady and her Spouse and for Maw to have the money ready.

After he wuz gone Maw counted up what it wuz going to cost. It wuz going to take all our Christmas money we had saved up, the funds for Bridget's shoes, half the grocery money and

Maw's insurance she was carrying fer us if she shuffled off ahead of time.

Maw said it would keep our noses to the grindstone for a year, but she didn't want no innocent babes of hern sizzling in hell, nor Aggie stole into white slavery for want of a few images and scapulars and other religious necessities. She hoped the devil would get her, tooth and toenail if she wuz this unfeeling a mother.

CHAPTER II

Back in the Fold

When Father Roux come next day with the Blessed Virgin Mary under one arm and her Spouse under the other, he squinted in, anxious like, and asked if Aggie wuz home yet. Maw told him Aggie wouldn't be in till after dark. He shook his head and said he was anxious about her soul and told Maw to hurry her up to confession. I haint figgured out why my soul aint worth as much as Aggie's, but the Holy Father didn't give me no pressing invitation to meet him in confession. He set the Virgin and her Spouse in a chair and looked to see if they wuz alright. The man image wuz suffering from a crack on the head. Father Roux said a small thing like a cracked head when it was across the back where nobod'y know it, didn't matter, and he fixed to put them on the shelf.

"We'll take this here down," he says, reaching after my red and blue stars and stripes.

"What fer must the flag come down?" says Maw; "Mikey sets a heap of store by that glad rag."

"It gives a wrong impression," says the Holy

Father. "Catholic homes must have their signs and symbols. Saint Joseph here is the patron of the Universal Church. He will bring you luck."

"Say, Father—," says Maw, "let Saint Joseph hold the flag. That'll be a good way to keep them both."

"Saint Joseph hold the American Flag?" says he quite amazed like. "Not yet will Saint Joseph hold this flag. We're making America Catholic as fast as the law allows. When His Holiness the Pope is recognized as head of this heretical nation then will it be time to hoist up this emblem of civil government" and at this he took the flag.

"George Washington thought it wuz good enough to carry" said I to the Father.

"George Washington was no Saint," he says. "Joseph here is the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

"But Washington was the Father of his Country. Ain't it just as much a man's job to be father of his country as to be spouse to a Virgin—whatever that is?"

"Silence you heathen!" Father Roux said. "George Washington was not even a Catholic. He wuz a heretic and a free-mason. Get George

Washington out of your head and learn this prayer. Keep your ears open now," and he got in front of the Spouse with his cracked head and said: "Remember, O most pure Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, my sweet Protector, St. Joseph, that no one has ever had recourse to thy protection or implored thy aid without obtaining relief. Confiding in thy goodness, I come to thee and humbly supplicate thee. Despise not my petitions, O foster father of the Redeemer, but graciously hear them, Amen."

Then he got in front of the Virgin, who was wrapped up in a long, red paint cloak, crossed himself and said:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death, Amen. . . Blessed be the holy and immaculate to conception of the most blessed Virgin Mary."

After this he crossed himself again and told Maw to keep us Rooneys saying these prayers on account of the indulgences it would git us.

"What's an indulgence?" says I.

"Indulgences is to shorten your stay in Purgatory. Every time you say a prayer or go to mass or give offerings takes off a few days. These here prayers you heard me say takes off three hundred days of your stay in Purgatory."

"How long does a fellow have to stay in Purgatory?"

"That's according to one's sins on earth and the amount of praying you do and money you give for good works."

"Who keeps account of these here indulgences so's a fellow don't keep on a praying after he's prayed enough. Here's this bunch of us Rooneys can all be praying at once. That'll be three thousand days off at a crack. By all of us saying these here prayers a dozen times a day we pray off three or four years a month. Who keeps the books on this here Purgatory deal?

"You talk like a fool," says His Riverence, "one of them fools the Free Schools turns out. They make it a part of their teaching to ask questions. We teach our pupils to obey, never to question." Then to Maw he says, "Get your Rooneys lined up so I can see if I've got scapulars enough."

"What's a scapular?" I says, meek and polite like.

"Don't these here children know nothing?" says Father to Maw. "Didn't you tell them about these here scapulars?"

"No, your Riv'rence," Maw says, "You see I done forgot which is which 'mongst the scapu-

lars—the more shame to me. 'So,' says I, 'the childer shall learn from the mouth of the Howly Father himself about these sacred charms. And now here they be, and if one of them bats an eye, you Riv'rence while you're having spach is by me own hand I'll tan the daylights out of them. Proceed now, your Riv-rence and let's get the poor brats back into the fowld of Mother Church so I can git back to me washin', else there won't be no pay for all this here."

Then Maw began pulling the Rooneys out from behind the stove, and when they wuz lined up she says, "Now sthand still, you wigglin' worms, and hear what the Howly Father has to say about these howly scapulars what's going to be tied onto you."

Father Roux was getting his book. It wuz black with a gold cross on the lid. He read from it like this:

"The Blessed Virgin appeared in a vision to Blessed Simon Stock, General of the Carmelites, and gave him a scapular. She declared the scapular should be a pledge of salvation, a safeguard in danger, and that those who die wearing the scapular should not burn in the flames of hell. The Church perpetuates the memory of this event by the feast of Our Lady of Mount

Carmel, celebrated July 16. To share in the benefits and indulgences attached to the scapular, you must be invested by a duly authorized priest and wear the scapular devotedly. . .You must preserve chastity according to your state in life and recite daily the Breviary of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin or at least recite the prayer or perform the good works enjoined by a duly authorized priest. It is a pious belief that those who faithfully observe these rules and die wearing the scapular will be freed from purgatory on the Saturday following their death."

"Howly Mary, have mercy on the sowls of poor Paddy and Nora," groaned Maw. "The poor darlins yet tortured in purgatory when they might have been out the next Saturday if they'd had the protection of the blessed scapular of our Blessed Lady," and Maw began to heave.

"Don't get no sob-show started," I says to Maw. "This here thing's easy. We Rooneys what's alive will wear our scapulars and the whole bunch of us will come walking out of purgy the Saturday after we get in not even scorched. And between the time we shuffle off and this here time we'll say enough prayers to

them images on the shelf to get Paddy and Nora out and some left over."

"Don't lose no time getting that boy into Parochial school," says Father Roux. "He don't know the first beginning of reverence."

"It's tomorrow he'll be starting," says Maw. Then the Holy Father began blessing the scapulars and handing them out.

"These is brown," says Maw. "Mine used to be red."

"These are the scapulars of Our Lady of Mount Carmel," says Father Roux. "The Red Scapular is the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The White Scapular is the Most Holy Trinity. The Blue Scapular is the Scapular of the Immaculte Conception and the Black Scapular is the Scapular of Our Lady of Sorrows. She wore a black habit when she appeared to the seven noble Florentines and commanded them to wear a black habit in memory of her dolors. The Holy Mother Church has scapulars of all kinds, all bringing blessings when piously worn."

"Gee whizz!" I says, "brown—red—white—blue—black—who knew the Virgin had so many dresses? She must have took a trunk full when she went to heaven!'

"Shut up your mouth," Maw says to me with her eyes glued on His Riverence who looked mad enough to bite. "What business is it of yourn whether the Blessed Lady had five robes or never a shirt to her back? Keep your trap shut."

Father Roux wuz getting out the scapulars now—bits of brown cloth on a string and they wuz hung around the Rooneys necks. The last to get his protection wuz the baby. He's crawled into the coal box while the others wuz getting rigged up and was gnawing a hunk of coal when Maw grabbed him out.

"Come here, you nigger," she says. "Don't let this here one git left. This here one needs protection the most. In a tenement with stairs steep as a ladder and black as pitch it's the devil of a time a poor brat has when he takes a tumble. Mary McGinty's poor lamb—save the pieces—fell down two flights leavin' the skin of his head along the way and winding up at the finish by cutting his left ear half off and knocking two teeth down his throat. His howls was fearful and Mary was that mad she walloped the poor lamb half to death. I want protection fer this here one."

"You know the value of the blessed scapular,"

said his Reverence, "It'll keep your child from creeping to the stairs. But if he should go to the stairs he won't fall. If he should fall he won't fall far. If he should roll to the bottom he won't break no bones. If he should break one bone, he won't break all of them. If he should break all of them it won't kill him. If it should kill him he'll go in peace to the bosom of our Blessed Lady."

"God be praised," said Maw. "Scapulars is wonders."

After all us Rooneys was decorated with our strings with pieces of the Blessed Virgin's brown coat on them, it wuz time to pay. We scraped up every cent with part of the rent and the price of our Sunday dinner caused Father Roux didn't make no reduction for the crack in Saint Joseph's head. When I seen the Sunday stew money going into the pocket of the Holy Father I asked him if he couldn't put a bit more string on my charm.

"What for?" says he.

"So it'll hang down over that place what's going to be full of soup instead of stew on Sunday and bless it into feeling like its full of meat," I says.

"Has that boy got good sense?" he asked Maw.

"It's no lack of sense that's ailing the young goat," says Maw. "His wits is as good as they make. He got here, you see, before the Rooneys wuz going to seed. Mikey's a bright boy, he is, your Riv'rence."

"Then its penance he needs."

"And what's penance?" I says.

"There you go again asking questions," he says. "You'll find out what penance is. An' you," he says to Maw, "must get some Holy Water and later a relic. Then he made the sign of the cross and we wuz back in the fold."

CHAPTER III

Paw Gets a Licking

Saint Peter,

Your Holiness:

I don't know whether your maw and paw ever mixed nor who whipped. Maybe your paw never set around Mulginty's and deviled the life out of your maw when he come home, like my Paw does my Maw. Maybe when the Holy Father told your maw your paw wuz head of the family she's let him walk all over her cause marriage is a holy sacrament.

But my Maw's not built on that model, and last night she just naturally and eternally layed Paw out.

After we got to spending money for images and scapulars and holy water and masses and other things to make us religious, we haint had nothing else and Paw has been doing the same old way, only worse, and spending all his money at Mulginty's.

Saturday night he come home whizzed. It took him half an hour to climb the stairs. His legs worked like corkscrews and you ought to have seen him when he come twisting in.

Paw has whiskers. Not the long, wavy kind like Saint Joseph, but the kind that looks like underbrush which has been used to mop up something. Paw had beer froth on his whiskers and smelled like a garbage can on the Fourth of July. He grinned at Maw when he come in and waving his hat said, "The top of the mornin' to you, Jinny, me love!" Then he fell onto the bed and next thing Maw heard something splash. When she seen it wuz Paw messing her clean floor all up, she wuz mad.

Paw is some size and has a shape around the middle like Father Roux. Up toward the top Paw's neck branches into a head with a back to it. Father Roux's neck runs into his head without no side stations and rounds off like a sugar bowl. After Paw spoiled the floor he got busy snoring and dribbling a little. Maw set looking at him.

I knew there wasn't going to be no love lost. Maw's a self-starter and when she gets jawing she tells Paw where to head in and he does it. She didn't jaw none tonight. She just set looking and looking at Paw.

Then she says, "Timmy, my son, go down to the next floor to Mrs. Smithkin what sews awnings and borrow fer your mother a big

needle and a few threads of strong twine." And to me she says, "Michael, my son, jist step acrost the hall to Mary McGraw and borrow a bedslat or two and don't you git none that's unsound or weakly."

I did as Maw said. Timmy did the same. When I got back with by bedslat and Timmy with his twine, Maw had Paw straightened out on the bed with a double blanket rolled around him.

"Gimme a needleful of thread," says Maw, and she began sewing Paw up and him with his legs and arms by his side as straight and decent as if he wuz fixed for purgy. Paw he smiled sweet as a little girl angel and snored and slobbered. Maw didn't say nothing till she got him all sewed up. Then she says "Michael, me son, lend a hand. Help to roll the old cuttle-fish over."

"But what will His Riverence say?" I asked Maw. "Paw's the head of the family and marriage is a holy institution."

"And what good will it do fer him to say at all? A head that ain't no use but to pour booze in and hang a hat on ain't no good head for a family of ten, I'm tellin' ye. If the Holy Father would let me buy a divorce I'd be rid of the pest. But if marriage is a howly institution and can't

never be broken, then by all the saints I'll have satisfaction in me own way. It's two-thirds goat your fawther is, Michael, my son, and the other two-thirds is fool. Tain't no use to try gittin' the goat out of him. It's a part of him, like them ratty whiskers and his unhowly appetites. But I'm going to beat the fool out of him. Gimme that bedslat now."

With this Maw took the slat and began to lay on. The smile faded from Paw's boozy countenance and he jerked like a jumping-jack when you pull the string. Then she gave him another crack, and another, laying the slat square across that part of Paw's back portion that he sets on through the week at Mulginty's. Paw tried to get his hands down to that portion to see what wuz working on him. Then he tried to kick. But twan't no use. By this time he wuz getting sobered up fast and Maw was helping at it. Once she stopped to get a drink and roll up her sleeves. Then she went at Paw again. He tried to cuss, but Maw soon put a stop to this. Then he told her he'd have her arrested. She gave him three whacks when he said this and says, "You are, are you? You better do it first, you blathering idiot and tell about it afterwards," and she spanked a few more turns.

Then Paw got crying and begging and praying to the Holy Virgin and calling on all the saints and the Spouse on our shelf. At last Maw asked Paw if he wuz ready to quit his boozing. He told her if she'd rub some grease on the back of him and git him a walkin' stick he'd start out right then and vote the Prohibition ticket.

Next day Paw wanted to stay in bed but Maw said there wasn't nothing doing in this line so she told him to hustle hisself over to the docks and see if he couldn't earn enongh honest coppers to buy a few buckets of coal. Paw walked like he needed a few drops of machine oil on his joints when he set out, but Maw said he'd limber up time he'd unloaded a half-dozen trucks of freight.

After he wuz gone Maw did some more jawing about Paw and said if matrimony wasn't such a dickens of a howly institution she'd lock Paw out and he could get his rations out of the bread line and sleep in the park. But Father Roux keeps saying marriage is a holy institution and can't be nothing else cause the Church says so. So I suppose Paw'll have to take what's coming to him as long as Maw stays a good Catholic.

CHAPTER IV

A Miracle! A Miracle!

We hadn't more than got our Rooneys scapulared when we had to get that holy water Father Roux was talking about. He wanted Maw to buy five dollars worth. He said on account of the size of the family it would take an extra amount.

Maw told the Holy Father she hadn't seen five dollars in one chunk since she got back into the fold. She tried to talk him into selling a dollar's worth, but he finally eased her out of three dollare and we put the holy water the Holy Father gave us up on the shelf between the Holy Virgin and her Holy Spouse and Maw warned the Rooneys to let it alone or she'd doctor them with the shillalah.

Nobody knows who done it, but somebody took the lid off the pail. Maw says she knows for a certainty it was Paw cause buckets is his weakness. Besides there was a swig or two gone out of the holy water and a wet spot behind the stove where nothing don't leak and Maw said Paw done this and wuz so mad cause the pail fooled him he wouldn't cover it up. Anyhow

somebody done it and a measly little rat fell into what wuz left and drowned hisself.

Nobody noticed this till at night when Tommie got wheezing and choking and Maw went after the water. She give a screech when she saw the rat and says, "Howly Moses and the Saints! Its sphoiled the howly water is by this dirty baste of a rat and Tommy wheezin' the lungs out of his body and no money to fetch a doctor. Bad luck and the devil get Rooney!" and Maw stood looking into the bucket and growling.

She wuz in an awful undone fix but I says, "Holy water's holy water. What's good for men wont hurt rats. If a few drops of this here water sprinkled on a human can purify him up, a rat what's soaked in it ought to be cleaned up so's he wont hurt nothing. That's a sanctified rat, peace to his ashes. Gimme a fork and I'll fish him out and then you just sprinkle Timmy and don't lose no time. He's wheezing worse than a fire engine working overtime."

Maw looked into the water after the rat come out and says, "I don't see no signs of it being hurt. Anyhow its this or nothin' fer the price of a doctor's done gone into it, but I wish to me sowl I'd got a bone of the toe of the howly Saint Joseph instead."

"Bone of a toe?" I says. "Bone of a toe?"

"Yes," Maw answered, "His Riv'rence says there aint nothing so good, Saints' bones comes high, but they're more endurin' than howly water and rats can't fall in and drownd."

"But they can eat them," I says.

"We kin kape a bone in a glass jar with the top tight down and t'wont be no temptation to that pest of a Rooney."

While Maw was saying this she's been sprinkling Timmy. The water wuz cold and Timmy jumped nearly off the bed when the first drops hit him in the eyes. He started to cry but the cry was choked off by a fit of coughing and he coughed and struggled till Maw wuz so sure he wuz dying she turned white to the ears.

"What's the use putting this water on the outsides of him?" I says to Maw. "It's his insides what's making all this row. Let's get some of this holy water onto the place what's ailing."

"Mikey my son," says Maw, "you've a long head, fer a fact. Come on with yer howly water in a cup this time."

We gave Timmy half a cup full. He wuz choking so hard we held his nose and poured it down him. It wuz terrible the way he wuz choking to death. But no sooner had that blessed

holy water touched the insides of him than he began heaving like a East River tug towing a coal barge. Then up came the holy water bringing everything with it. Maw says she never seen anything like the way Timmy throwed up amongst his supplys being a tin thimble what come up missing two weeks ago. When he got hisself cleaned out he wasn't choking no more, but just settled back peacefully as a warm cat and fell asleep. Maw said she never seen a cure so quick. She says, "Michael, me son, call Mary McGraw."

Then Mary McGraw crossed herself in front of the Blessed Virgin and went out to call the neighbors to see with their own eyes that Timmy Rooney wuz chokin' to death wuz cured with never a doctor nor drop of medicine. Grandad McGraw with his leg warped for three years, and old Mrs. Quiggle deaf in both ears and blind in one eye was among them that came in to take a look. Grandad McGraw said he'd have some of that same kind of holy water if it took the coat from his back to pay the price and old lady Quiggle said she wuz going to take the money her son give her for a new shawl and get her some holy water to unstop her deaf ears and get back her bad eye.

Next day the neighbors set out to where Father Roux lives with bottles and jugs and buckets and I bet he sold a barrel of holy water and last Sunday he told about the miracle at ten o'clock mass. Folks stared like they didn't believe it but Timmy wuz there with Maw and when they all heard how near dead he wuz and seen him standing there alive and grinning, they wuz convinced. I suppose His Reverence will do a business in holy water that will make Mulginty look pale until all the cripples and sore-eyed in this part of town are cured up.

CHAPTER V

I Tackle the Saints

Saint Peter,

Holy Eminence:

When you wuz a kid did you go to Free School, or Parochial? Maybe both like me. But say, aint there a bushel of difference in the two sorts of schools?

Miss Hattie, my teacher over at Free School, she wuz just a nice lady with clothes on like real people wears. She had beads on her neck sometimes but she didn't use them to say her prayers on.

My teachers at Parochial is named Sister Agatha and Sister Clementina Carmel. They wear black clothes with big white collars all around their necks and heads and widder's veils. Their beads hangs down one side and is used to say prayers on.

You don't call them "Miss Agatha," nor "Miss Clementina Carmel" like they wuz live people. You call them "Sister" and say it like you wuz talking to God. This is cause these kind of teachers has taken holy orders. Men and women both takes holy orders in the One True Church. When

a man gets his he can wear women's clothes and turn bread into flesh and forgive sins on earth and hear confessions. He's a Priest when he gets his.

When the ladies gets theirs they can't wear men's clothes nor turn bread into anything nor forgive no sins nor hear no confessions. I don't know who thought out the holy order plan but whoever it was give the women a punk deal. They don't get no show no sort of way. Their clothes is black and nothing to brag on for style. They don't never keep company with men they don't get no pay for working. Looks like if a few of them could be put at hearing confessions the men would go to confession more. Father Roux says its a sin the way men neglect the confession, and he ought to know. He's been after our Aggie since he first seen her but he don't say nothing to me about coming. But the ladies what takes orders gets the small end of the deal. Nobody what takes holy orders can marry. If everybody wuz to get religious and take holy orders the Paw and Maw business would be ruined and there wouldn't be no more babies but them poor little rascals that's left in orphanages. I aint saying nothing about holy orders though, nor Holy Fathers nor Holy Sisters. Sister Agatha

and Sister Clementina Carmel both taught me first thing that the word of a priest and a sister must never be questioned or disputed. I asked her if I couldn't say nothing if they wasn't telling the truth. Sister Clemintina Carmel says after holy orders its impossible to tell an untruth. Sister Agatha says, "Don't ask questions. Obey. Obey. Obey. That's the way to become a good Catholic!"

Miss Hattie used to make us mind, but what she said most wuz this, "Think, Mikey, think. That's the way to become a good American citizen. Think for yourself, Mikey. What's the use of having a brain if you never use it." Miss Hattie didn't know how to say prayers on beads. If she did she'd know you don't have to think.

At the Free School the boss man has to behave hisself or the Board what give him his job gets a new man. I heard Miss Hattie and another teacher talking one day about a boss what wuz there once what got too smart with one of the lady teachers. He got fired.

The Parochial has a boss too. He's the Priest. Father Roux is the boss of my Parochial. The Parochial boss has it all over the Free School boss man. Nobody can fire him. There ain't no Board to monkey with his business. He

hires hisself and naturally enough when he gets onto a good thing like a Parochial, he ain't going to fire hisself out. Teachers in the Free School gets pay for teaching. But the Sisters don't get no pay. The Holy Church gets it all. This is where the Parochial has it on the Free School again.

They don't teach the same things neither. Sister Agatha and Sister Clementina Carmel is working on me right now to get me ready to die. I've got a prayer to Saint Barbara, a virgin and a martyr that comes to the rescue in the last hour. Then there's another prayer with a preamble like the Constitution had what Miss Hattie used to each me. This here preamble states that my heart is humble and full of compunction. I don't know what compunction is. I suppose its the disease that's taking me off. Anyhow my heart's full of it and I'm praying my last prayer. It begins with my trembling and benumbed hands, moves up to my dim and distorted eyes, mentions my pale cheeks which strikes the bystander with awe and compassion, has a word about my hair which is wet with the sweat of death that strikes me in the last hour. The ears are spoken about in this last prayer that hear terrible noises and it tells about imagi-

nations torturned by horrible spectres and how I shall wrestle with the powers of darkness that will strive in my dying moments to cast me headlong into the pit of despair, and the goblins that will be standing with their pitchforks ready to chuck me into the furnace when I shuffle off. There's a lot of it and I have to learn it by heart. Then there's the last sighs of the dying I have to learn. It starts out, "I die in the Holy Roman Catholic Church. I believe all that the Holy Church believes and teaches." Sister Agatha says its important to say this with your last breath or there might be some mistake about whether you wuz a Catholic and none others need apply.

Miss Hattie didn't spend no time teaching us to die. She wuz always talking about getting us ready to live. She read us something one day about death, a poet said it. He said there aint no sure enough, hell fire, death. What men call death is just a name for changing into another kind of creature just like worms shed their ugly skins and turn into butterflies. Miss Hattie says we humans has been a long time growing into the kind we are. She says we've been lots of different sorts of things before we got to be the fine animals we are now and its likely we'll

be changing some more before God gets us made as fine as he wants us. She says death aint nothing to get scared of and she read about a man that said when his time come to shuffle off he wuz going to wrap his coat around himself and lie down like a man instead of being whipped like a galley slave. But he wouldn't be no good Catholic. Catholics has to be scared into fits about death. If there wasn't no scare there wouldn't be no way of working the rabbit foot. The only reason Maw took me out of Free School is cause His Riverence scared her about Paddy and Nora and hell fire. The only reason she's taking the stew out of the pot and covers off the bed in cold weather is because the Holy Father's got her scared of torments that follows death. Now they're teaching it to me. I told Sister Clementina Carmel that Miss Hattie said 'twasn't any use to get scared of death—that we had come up along the line and wuz going on to better things and the changin' wasn't painful. She said such ideas wuz ungodly and infidel. Only the Holy Catholic Church knew what wuz what when it come to death and purgatory and hell. She told me to forget every word Miss Hattie had ever said and think about the Blessed Virgin and the Saints and she gave me about a thou-

sand Saints' names to learn by heart. She said it would train my memory.

Miss Hattie used to make me learn the multiplication table to strengthen my memory. She said it would be useful later cause I could turn it into dollars and cents. But Sister Clementina Carmel don't know nothing about dollars and cents. She haint got no use for them. So she set me at the Litany of the Saints. Here's some of them:

St. Stephen.
St. Laurence.
St. Vincent.
Sts. Fabian and Sebastian.
St. Cosmas and Damian.
Sts. Gervasius and Protarius.
All ye holy Martyrs.
St. Sylvester.
St. Gregory.
St. Ambrose.
St. Augustine.
St. Dominic.
St. Bernard.
St. Nicholas.
All ye holy Monks and Hermits.
St. Mary Magdaline.
St. Lucy.

St. Cecelia.
St. Catherine.
St. Agatha.
St. Anastasia.
All ye holy Virgins and Widows.

This here is the way it starts. You say the saints' names till your tongue gets tied and then you change the tune long enough to say "Pray for us." Then you start in again on the names. Sister Clementina Carmel says its good training. She and Sister Agatha both says if I tackle the Saints and get away with them and learn the prayers I'll get a fine bunch of indulgences and like enough live to be a Knight of Columbus and carry a gun for His Holiness and the glory of Mother Church.

Miss Hattie never promised nothing like this. The best she done wuz to say I'd make a good American citizen if I kept on like I wuz going.

CHAPTER VI

Aggie on the War Path

Most Howly Saint Peter:

I don't know whether you know much about women. As the first one of the infallible Popes you got it from God straight that you wuz slated to be an old bachelor—leastways so far as folks knows. Its been some time since you wuz a young priest living amongst us live ones down here and maybe you've forgot how young girls acted that come to your confessional for spiritual help and whether any of them kicked up a row. Maybe there wasn't no girls in your day like our Aggie. Aggie she's some holy terror when she gets riled and Father Roux has done something that's got her stirred up to fighting pitch. When Aggie gets to fighting pitch the best thing to do is to let her alone.

But let me tell. Maw had to work on Aggie the longest before she got her to confessional. Aggie's got a beau, Big Blue what's head of the police crew in the 14th street district. He's smitten awful bad with our Aggie. He brings her home when she has to work overtime and

don't let no other fellow take her to no shows nor nothing. Aggie said she didn't know nothing about confessional but she didn't think much of getting into any small box with any strange man to tell him any tale of woe.

Maw told Aggie Father Roux wasn't no strange man. He was a Priest.

"Maybe so," says Aggie, "maybe so he's a Priest, but I bet he's a man at the same time, and a man's a man and a small box aint no place for a decent girl to be caught in with a man, and Big Blue he wouldn't stand for it."

"But Aggie, me love," says Maw, "the howly Praste is not like other men no more. He's taken howly orders, he has, and them dirty things what other men is always at don't come to his mind no more. And the box darlin' has two sides. And you stay on the one side and the Holy Father on the other. Its spiritual solace he'll be after givin' you and what could yer heart more desire?"

"I'd rather have a raise of a dollar a week than all the spiritual solace he's got in stock," says Aggie. "Beside I'll bet he's a grafter."

Maw told her a Holy Father couldn't be a grafter and she worked on Aggie some more. But Aggie said she wasn't going until after

Christmas. She had been saving her money four months and had ten dollars to buy a dress and a dollar to buy Big Blue a necktie pin. Aggie said two of the girls at Snyders went to confession and got miked. One of them had eight dollars saved to buy a coat. Father Roux told her she ought to make a Christmas offering to Holy Mother Church so as to get an indulgence for her mother and get her out of purgatory. The girl's maw had been suffering in purgatory a year. His Riverance told the girl if she'd give this eight dollars to the Church for the poor, it would get her maw out of her misery by Easter. He said the usual price was twenty-five dollars and he just made this special offer to her cause he wuz a friend of poor working girls. This girl wuz half Jew and half Catholic. The Catholic in her wanted to get her maw out of Purgatory. The Jew in her wanted to get twenty-five dollars worth of something for eight dollars. So she bit. She's wearing her old coat another winter. Aggie says its a disgrace to civilization. The other girl had a little sum saved up to give her sister what's sick with consumption a week's vacation. Father Roux told her about our miracle and separated her from her coin for holy water and the first payment on

a toe-bone of St. Joseph. That's two of St. Joseph's bones that's coming to New York. This here old town surely will have luck.

But let me get back to Aggie. Maw finally hit the trail to Aggie's soft spot. She told Aggie if she would go to confessional and do just what Father Roux said we'd soon be able to get Paddy and Nora out of Purgatory, and soon as they wuz safely landed in heaven she wuz going to cut out spending so much for religion and buy some new furniture so's Aggie could have a place where Big Blue could come to court her. This got Aggie and she promised to go to confession the next Saturday.

All this time the Holy Father had been right after Maw on account of Aggie's immortal soul and for fear some fiend of a man would get his vile clutches on her.

When Aggie come home from confession she wuz mad—this here blowed up sizzing over kind of mad. Aggie's eyes are blue. But when she gets mad enough they turn green and look fiery.

"Have you been to confessional?" says Maw.

"Call it that if you want to," says Aggie and she threw something across the room that hit the sugar bowl and set it leaking on the floor.

What she throwed wuz a little black book with a gold cross on the lid.

"Howly Moses!" exclaimed Maw taking her hands from the tub and letting water drip from both of them. "Timmy get a spoon and go after the sugar—and you, Aggie, darlin'—did His Riv'rence put a blessin' on you?"

"Blessing?" says Aggie jerking off her coat and pitching it on the bed. "Blessing? Sure, and it wasn't no blessing the low-lived son of a blackguard put on me, it wuz his dirty hands. Do you get me?"

Maw stared a minute. Then she says, "Well, darlin', what of it? Well do I remember how the Howly Father put his hands on me as I wuz laving Cork forever. 'Daughter,' sez he, in a voice to melt stone itself, 'Daughter,' he sez, 'you're goin' away and I'll miss ye. Don't ye want me prayers, daughter?' And when I told him I did, in that same swate tone he says, 'How much hev you got in your bag, daughter?' and I sez, 'Not much, yer Riv-rence, for the famine wuz bad last year, just a few harpers and a handful of raps.' 'And would ye divide with your Praste what's got to stay here and can't git away to America where there's money to burn? It's not for meself I'd be asking' but fer the poor

what's suffering.' And when I divided with the Howly Father he put his hands on me head and said in thim same swate tones, 'God bless you, me child—Gawd bless ye!' Never shall I fergit it. Taint no harm in a praste putting his hands on yer head, darlin'."

"He didn't put his hands on my head," Aggie snapped back.

"Mebbe on your shoulder, darlin'."

"Not on my shoulder neither."

"I bet he pinched her arm," I says to Maw, "and if Big Blue finds it out he'll—"

"I suppose it wuz your back then. I don't know no other place."

"No—not my back—the dirty devil!"

"I bet he pinched her arm," I says to Maw, "and if he did and Big Blue finds it out, he'll—"

"Shut up," yelled Aggie to me, "shut up and stay shut. This here aint no time for gabbing."

"Angels and Saints!" says Maw getting nervous, "if he didn't put his hands on your head nor your shoulder nor your back nor no other place, where did he put them?"

"The bull-headed, bull-necked, bull-breathing beast!" says Aggie getting ready to cry. "Mikey, if you're me own true brother get out the old meat knife and sharpen it up. I'll teach that

snake-eyed devil that calls himself a 'Holy Father' a thing before I get done with him," and Aggie began crying.

"Mother of Christ!" Maw exclaimed, "If this here's the way spiritual solace gits in its work, don't go to the Holy Father's confessional no more. Taint worth it, Aggie, darlin'," and Maw took Aggie in her arms and wiped the tears off her red cheeks. For a minute Aggie let Maw baby her. Then she jerked away and said, "Once more will I go to that box of satan. Next time its the old meat knife I'll have hid in my stocking leg and when that evil beast gets out in daylight his friends will think he's a walking butcher shop got loose, for take it from Aggie Rooney I'll spoil the countenance of him for—for—putting his hands on me." Then Aggie started crying again and throwed herself down on the bed and cried till she fell asleep. Maw said Aggie wuz tired out and the Holy Father like as not asked her some questions about Big Blue she didn't want to tell. Maw says there's a lot off stuff the priest asks what girls and women don't want to talk about and if they aint good Catholics they balk. Aggie don't seem to be no good Catholic or she wouldn't raise so much sand no matter what the Howly Father done.

CHAPTER VII

Cannibals

Saint Peter,

Holy and Respected Sir:

Maw tried two or three times to pick Aggie and fid out something more about her and Father Roux at confession. But Aggie got so fighting mad every time she heard his name Maw let up on her and started working on me so's I'd go to Mass at St. Patrick's on Christmas night. Father Roux says everybody in his parish ought to go to St. Patrick's once a year. St. Patrick's is the cathedral church. It cost four million dollars, Father Roux says, and it stands as a monument to the self-sacrifice of thousands of devoted poor who have contributed the savings of their humble toil at washtubs and workshops. And the poor can get in and see it all free with never a charge for nothing but twenty-five cents for a seat and the price of the Mass.

So Maw decided I'd represent the family at midnight Mass. We'd been hoping since cold weather set in that we'd have the luck to get a bed as four of us wuz sleeping on the floor. But with saving for the toe-bone of St. Joseph and

getting Paddy and Nora out of Purgatory and buying some new scapulars (for three of us Rooneys lost ourn) so's we can git out of Purgatory the Saturday after we get in, we couldn't get no new bed and had to take turn sleeping on the floor.

As often as time to go bed come about, Maw growled about the space Paw filled and said when Paddy and Nora wuz safe she wuz going to bust up the holy bonds of matrimony that held her to Paw, run him off and have the police arrest him if he ever set foot on her place again.

I didn't know nothing about Mass when I started to Parochial school and some more boys and girls from Free School didn't know nothing about it. So Sister Clementina Carmel who teaches catechism and Church history and Lives of the Saints taught us about it.

Mass is a show. It shows the way the Son of the Blessed Holy Virgin ate his last supper, wuz arrested and marched off to be killed. He wuz killed by the Jews. Sister Clementina Carmel says the Jews are a bad lot—that there aint nothing worse except infidels and free-masons. They made him carry his own cross and on the way when he wuz tired a lady wiped his face and got his photograph on her handkerchief. At

the last supper he changed bread and wine into real flesh and blood—no make-believe—no pink-colored water, but real flesh and blood. When he got it turned into some more of his own body beside what wuz with him he ate the small part and drank his own blood. I seen a man in a show turn a cabbage into a rabbit once. He wiggled his hnds out over the cabbage and said 'Hocus pocus,' and I'm shot if there didn't set that blame rabbit. But I haint never seen anything like a man turning bread into himself and then eating it. After he done this he told Peter, who wuz the first Pope, he wuz going to give him power to do the same miracle. And he did and after the Son of the Blessed Holy Virgin wuz dead and gone to heaven, Peter gave a supper and he turned the bread into the real flesh and wine into real blood. Then Peter he passed the miracle power on to another Pope and his priests and so its been handed down for a thousand years and when a man takes holy orders he's made into a Priest and can change bread into flesh and wine into blood, and its called Mass. The Priest, he acts the part of Jesus and the altar—that's the Cross. The Priest, he takes the bread now called Host. He turns it into meat, not cooked, and they gather around and

its good exercise and fixes faith. If I haint got it wrong its t-r-a-n-s, trans, s-u-b, sub, trans sub; s-t-a-an, stan, transubstan; t-i ti, transubstanti, a, transubstantia, t-i-o-n, shun, transsubstantiation. Sister Clementina Carmel and Sister Agatha both says all folks that don't believe in this here is infidels and heretics and don't stand no show of getting as much as one squint at even the back gate of heaven.

When I wuz in Free School Miss Hattie read us that a long time ago men what wuz called cannibals eat up other men. She says they used to fight with clubs and stones and the bunch what got killed furnished a picnic dinner for the bunch what did the killing. She says the live ones rolled the dead ones in the mud till they got a good crust all over them, then they rolled them in the fire and roasted them done, scraped off the baked mud and cleaned up the table even to picking the bones. Them wuz savages—the man-eating kind. Miss Hattie says cannibals is mostly dead, and I took it Miss Hattie knew. But Sister Clementina Carmel and Sister Agatha and Father Alphonsus what teaches figgers, and Father Roux all says Free Schools don't teach the truth. So maybe priests do turn crackers into real man-flesh and maybe folks

that don't have no appearance of being savages gathers round and eats it. If they do, it just proves that Miss Hattie aint as smart as she thinks she is an cannibals is not yet all dead.

I aint saying nothing about who's right and who's wrong. It's a mortal sin to question or to doubt and I wouldn't do it for nothing. But when I go to Mass at St. Patrick's I'm going to slip a pill-box up my sleeve and see if I can't get one of them wafers turned to flesh. If priests can turn flour-and-water-wafers into man-flesh they can turn cabbages into rabbits or do any other magic stunts they want to and holy orders is the job I'll be fitting myself for.

CHAPTER VIII

The Show at St. Patrick's

Saint Peter,

Holy Sir:

I hav'nt ever been to heaven yet and don't know what kind of petticoats and shimmys you popes and saints rig out in when you do your Heavenly Mass, but believe me, if you put on a better show than they do at Midnight Mass at St. Patrick's I don't see how you do it unless you let your lady angels take part. They don't have no ladies in the show here on earth. They let them take holy orders and wear clothes like nobody else wears. But they don't tell them how to do stunts like changing bread into flesh nor even walk in the big parade to the Altar. The lady's what has holy orders comes in a side door all covered with long black veils and kneel on a bench in the front row and say prayers on beads. But what the ladies lack in bright colors and grand dresses the men has on.

I got to St. Patrick's early and went clear to the front so I could see the whole thing. I don't know what sort of flowers you have on your Altar and I suppose your angels is the real kind

that can fly. The angels at St. Patrick's areheavy-weights, stone and marble and such stuff. But say, Howly Saint Peter, I didn't know there wuz such a beautiful place in the world as the Altar of St. Patrick's with the angels drooping their wings over it and a thousand lights with flowers growing between them and ferns and vines and over it all burning high, the red light that never goes out. On one side wuz the Blessed Virgin Mary flying off somewhere with her baby tucked in the front of her dress and a crown of electric lights shining over her head. On the other side stood Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Holy Virgin, but who didn't never marry her. If he'd married her she would have been Mrs. Joseph and her child would have had a real Paw. I told Maw Sister Clementina Carmel wuz telling us at Parochial what a godly man the Spouse of the Holy Virgin wuz and how obedient, to toil for her and the child and yet remain ever a husband in name only. Maw says its a good thing the Church made its saints out of the men what lived in them far-off days. She says them that's living today working hard to support virgin wives and children they're not daddy to, is scarce as hen's teeth. Sister Clementina Carmel says Joseph is deserving of the highest honor in the

Church. I see where she's right. If Joseph hadn't lived like a saint and let his wife be a virgin there wouldn't have been any Blessed Holy Virgin Mary, and when the Virgin goes the bottom tumbles out of the Holy Church. So they put a crown around the head of Saint Joseph too, and it wuz shining at Christmass Mass.

The real show began when the parade came in. You ought to have seen the Bishop. He wore a long red train carried by some boys in black petticoats and white kimonas—the bob-tailed kind like Aggie gets at Snyder's knocked down to 39c. The Bishop wore a little red hat turned up all around. After the Bishop and his trainbearers came the rest of the leading men. They wuz wearing the finest clothes you ever saw. Some had lace petticoats and some cloth. Some wore middy-blouses, like Aggie's, only bigger and finer. Some wore kimonas. A few had on shirts with the tails hanging out over their petticoats. A lot of them had on white satin opera capes like the fine ladies wears at shows, only I never seen so much gold roses and gold lace and grand embroidery and shining fringe in all my life. As the parade crossed the Altar every man dropped on his knee and made bows. This was in front of the little cupboard up high on the

altar, where, behind a little curtain, the crackers and wine is kept what Sister Clementina Carmel calls the "Mysterious Host."

There wuz a bundle of clothes on the Altar what had to be put on the Bishop. His long train wuz taken off and a bunch of the priests in white capes stood around in front while the others changed the long red train for a short red petticoat with a white lace overskirt and they stood a three-story hat on his head with gold signs all over it. When he wuz all fixed he went in front of the Altar and somebody handed him a big, round silvery-looking ball with holes in it. It had a long chain handle, and smoke wuz coming out through the holes. The Bishop swung this like he wuz flagging a train and the smoke came puffing out. It wuz sweet smoke and smelled up the whole place. I don't know what it wuz for but I suppose he wuz fumigating. Then the Bishop and the rest of them read and prayed and the people that filled the church kept kneeling down and getting up and crossing themselves. Pretty soon some bells rang and the Bishop and all the Priests bowed low. Then more bells rang. Then one of the Priests took the ball of smoke and while two other Priests held up the Bishop's white satin shirt-tail, he

shook the ball and the smoke come puffing out from under the shirt-tail. I suppose he wuz doing more fumigating. Then more bells rang. By this time the wafer up in the little cup-board wuz turned into flesh and they got it out. The Bishop took a bite and gave each of the Priests his share, one of them holding a silver plate under the chins of the rest of them so's no crumb could fall on unholy ground. The plate wuz a consecrated plate and the fingers of the Priests is consecrated fingers, them acting the part of the Son of the Blessed Holy Virgin.

After the Priests got theirs the folks went up and kneeled down by the altar railing which wuz covered with white sheets and towels. They stuck their hands under these sheets and towels, stretched their necks forward, shut their eyes and run out their tongues ready for the man-flesh made out of cracker. Then the Priest come holding the little thin wafer between his consecrated fingers and dropped it onto the tongue which wuz sticking out. Then the one what got it let it go down without mashing it in the teeth and wuz happy.

I picked the place I wuz going to kneel down close against the wall so's I could slip one hand out from under the sheet and get my pill-box

ready. Just before the Priest got to me I licked my tongue good and dry on my coat and when he dropped the wafer on it I held still a minute. Then I hunched down a little and slid my wafer into my pill-box and got up and went away looking happy as the rest of them.

When I got home I put it in a plate and stuck a penknife in it. But no blood spurted. I tried two or three times but nothing red or even pale pink showed up. Next morning I got a nail—like the Jew did—and tried again.

"Mikey," says Maw, "what's that yer foolin' wid?"

"A small section of flesh," says I.

"Flesh?" says Maw, "flesh of what?"

"A man," says I.

"Michael, me son," says Maw, "you wuz always a liar, me son. But since you're in Parochiel yer tin times worse. D'ye think I'm belaving yer idiotic lies? Lemme see what ye got?"

When Maw seen what I had she says, "Muhrder! Michael! Git that howly thing out of me house! Take it away!"

"I'm taking it to Sister Clementina Carmel," says I. "She told me the Priest turned it into flesh—real, sure enough flesh of a man and I'm

taking it to show her it aint no more flesh than our cook-stove. Look at it!"

But Maw drew back saying like she wuz scared to death, "God and all the howly saints have mercy," and running to the shelf she crossed herself and began praying to the Virgin and Saint Joseph, between prayers telling me to run fast to Sister Clementina Carmel or I'd be struck dead in my tracks for my sacrilege before I ever got there.

I hurried to Parochial and gave the pill-box to Sister Clementina Carmel and told her I couldn't get no blood out of it. When she looked in the box she give a fearful scream and dropped it all. Then she called Sister Agatha and Father Alphonsus and they all stood back shivering while I told them it wasn't nothing but a cracker.

Then Father Roux wuz sent for.

"What's this?" says he looking at the bunch of us.

"Mortal sin," says Sister Clementina Carmel.

"Sacrilege," says Sister Agatha.

"Persecution—infidel apostacy!" says Father Alphonsus.

"What you been doing?" says His Riverance to me.

"I aint done nothing," says I, "but to get this

here cracker and bring it to Sister Clementina Carmel. She said it wuz flesh, and blood would spurt out and I wanted to see for myself."

"You wanted to see! You wanted to see! This the vile teaching of that godless system known as the Free School. You wanted to see for yourself? Couldn't you take the word of a holy Sister and a holy Priest, Couldn't you, I say?"

Then he got down on his kneews to examine. "It looks like the Host," he says, "but it's not. See—touch it—its nothing but the wafer and by this sign what he says is not true. He never got this from the consecrated fingers of a priest."

Then Father Roux told me I should swear I was a liar or he'd consign me to the Protectorate in this life and torment hereafter. I wasn't so all-fired scared of torment cause if he don't hit the truth no nearer on hell fire than he does on wafers turned to flesh, he don't know nothing about it. But when he said "Protectorate" he got my goat. I knew a kid what wuz sent to the Protectorate from the Juvenile. He told me what's doing in there where nobody ever comes to inspect and there aint no cops to help a feller out. So I told Father Roux I was the durndest

big liar God ever turned loose, that I made the whole tale up—and the wafer too, to get a little joke on Sister Clementina Carmel. I told him I believed every word she said and wouldn't ask another question if I lived to be a thousand.

But I want to slip it to you, Saint Peter, I've told you the facts in the case and just between the two of us I think Miss Hattie wuz right when she says the cannibals is all dead. Anyhow them people who think they're eating sure enough flesh is being miked to a fare-you-well.

CHAPTER IX

We Give a Charity Bazaar

Saint Peter,

Highly Respected Sir:

His Riverence, Father Roux, says the Parochial is one of the most important of all the institutions of Mother Church. He says in addition to building up the most holy faith of the True Church in coming generations its a fine thing for working up charity bazaars, and charity bazaars is the best money getting stunts the priests pull off.

When I found out priests are just faking when they say they work the magic on the bread I thought maybe I'd better try t owork up to being an American Citizen instead of a Holy Father. Then I says what difference does it make if they do fake the people, if the people don't know no better. Its the same for the priest. Then when I found out what grand things these charity bazaars is for the priests, I says for sure I'll take holy orders.

When I told Maw she said I wasn't going to do no such thing. Priests is all right if you don't

get too much of them but they're mighty expensive to support and too many of them grinds the poor too hard. Maw says, "Back in the ould counthry, Michael, me son, I lived to see the howly fathers so plentiful there wuz one in every neighborhood to be supported after the manner that howly fathers demands. And there wuz convents and nunneries built up all over and the poor bein' stharved to pay fer it all. So my fawther sez—poor sowl—'Let's lave owld Ireland and git into Americky where there's more men, and howly fathers is not takin' the earth.' And so we come, Michael, me son, and wuz gettin' by with enough to eat and a roof overhead and a bit put aside in the bank, whin here comes along His Riv'rence to git our hard earnins again fer the prastes. I'm not begrudgin' it at all—at all until poor little Paddy and Nora gets where they can be aisy. But Michael—me son—supposin' you boys what's in Parochial takes a notion to be prastes. God, Michael, me boy—how's the poor goin' to feed the whole raft of thim? 'Twill be like it is in the owld counthry. Suppose, now, Michael, that Father Roux wuz three howly fathers insthed of only one—what'ud we do? God have mercy, Michael, me

son, we'd be sucked dhry as the skin on a last year's lemon. Git the praste out of your head. They works a hardship on the poor. Enough of a good thing's enough," says Maw.

But Maw don't know how these charity bazaars is run. There's something to them besides what folks sees and somebody gets the money besides what folks thinks. I found this out when Father Roux sent me to Alderman Mulginty's saloon, though it aint called a saloon no more, to give him twenty-five tickets. They cost a dollar apiece and wuz tickets to the big charity bazaar which wuz to be given in an uptown park for the poor little orphans in an assylum.

Sister Clementina Carmel picked out some of the boys and girls in Parochial and excused them from school for a week to sell tickets. I wuz told to go to Father Roux house which is stuck onto one side of the Parochial and get the tickets and take them to Alderman Mulginty's saloon. Father Roux said it wuz the Alderman's day to visit this saloon and I wuz to ask for him and give him the tickets.

I found him alright and handed him the package just like Father Roux told me.

"What's this?" says Alderman Mulginty.

"Its twenty-five tickets at one dollar each to the charity bazaar for the poor little orphans," I says.

"It is, hey?" he said, mad like. "Who sent them here?"

"Father Roux," says I.

Then he cussed a little and said, "Take them back to Father Roux and tell him I've had my leg pulled to the limit. I'm working night and day getting city funds for Catholic institutions. I haven't never turned down nothing the Church has asked for in the way of appropriations for assylums and houses of mercy and homes for the faithful and all such things. And I've helped get every church and parsonage and convent and hospital and school in New York City on the free tax list beside fifty-eight homes, nineteen clubs, four assylums, five colleges, one protectory and three cemeteries. I've helped get their whole blooming lot of real estate worth $100,000,000 on the free tax list and over $2,000,000 out of the city fund to help run these Church institutions, half of them which is self-supporting. And here he comes now telling me to hand over some of my own coin for bazaar tickets. Take them

back, buddie. There's nothing stirring in the way of money."

When I gave the tickets back to Father Roux he wuz mad. He said, "We'll see," and he sent me out in another direction with another bunch to another saloonkeeper who took them.

The next night after this Father Roux met Paw just as he wuz coming home and stopped him.

"Mr. Rooney," says he, "just a minute. You know Mulginty, do you?"

"Do I?" says Paw, "its me home, Mulginty's is and me friend is Mulginty. And fer his kindness I turn things a bit his way whin the votes is cast."

"A friend you are of Mulginty's? Well, are you a True Son of the Mother Church?" says Father Roux.

"That I am," answered Paw. "There aint no truer living'."

"Well, listen now," says the Howly Father, "Mulginty's going to be let out from being Alderman. He's been in a long time but he's not acting the part of True Son of Mother Church and there's those who will. There's a new place, Mr. Rooney, where you can get a drink just two

blocks farther down. Drop in tonight. You'll find all your old friends there and free drinks and a jolly good time. And Rooney, get acquainted with the boss. He's likely to be the next Alderman. You'll drop in, Rooney?"

"Free drinks and yer askin' if I'll drop in?" and Paw laughed till I thought he'd fall off the pavement.

I don't know what changed Alderman Mulginty's mind about the tickets. Maybe the first lot wasn't big enough. Anyhow he come down to see Father Roux next day and I seen him give him some bills and take two packages of tickets. He said he wuz doing it for the poor little orphans.

Father Roux sent Maw word she had to go and take all the Rooneys. He said folks like Maw and her children which had a good home and plenty of everything didn't know nothing about the sorrows of poor little orphans and it wuz their Christian duty to help bazaars. He told Maw to bring all the spare change she had so the children could have a good time.

Maw said she would have had a good time if she'd won anything. There wuz all sorts of grab—bags and raffles and chance games. Maw tried

them all as long as her money lasted and didn't get nothing but a paper monkey with a long string tail out of a fish pond. There wuz one place she spent half a dollar buying paddles to see if she couldn't draw a doll for poor little Bridget. Bridget wuz sick and had a boil on her back to boot. She seen the dolls and begged so hard Maw tried her luck. The lady at the wheel wuz about as pretty as you ever set eyes on. After a while she got sorry for poor little howling Bridget and gave her a doll that the legs had come loose from. The sawdust wuz leaking out but Maw tied the leak with the string off her monkey's tail and Bridget wuz tickled to death. Maw said it wuz luck—but not gambling luck.

The charity bazaar lasted a week. Thousands of folks wuz there and loads of money wuz collected in for the poor little orphans.

Father Roux wuz present everytime I wuz there and stayed around the booth where the pretty lady turned the wheel for the dolls. She didn't have no such opinion of him as our Aggie has. She liked to have him around and when the wheel wouldn't work or a doll got jabbed and started to losing sawdust she asked Father Roux to help her fix things and he wuz there.

One night, just before the bazaar closed, I seen Father Roux and the pretty lady going for a walk. I didn't know where they wuz headed and wuz just trailing along when I seen him look over at a little house hid in behind some vines, and seen this wuz the way they wuz going. Then I started to following sure enough and when I seen them go in, I figgered he wuz going to have confessional and I'd slip up and see what it wuz he said that made Aggie so hopping mad.

Around on the back side the vines and bushes wuz thick and I had to crawl in easy and slow. So I didn't get to hear the whole thing and they didn't stay in there but a minute. But what I heard was curious. I heard him say, "You're sure he won't be home?"

"She says, "I'm not looking for him. But even if he should come, and should come out to the house and find you there, are you not a holy father? Are you not a priest? He would never suspect anything."

"Are you sure he has never suspected anything?"

"Don't get cold feet, ducky-darling," she says laughing real low and sweet, "my husband is a good Catholic, a good Catholic, sweetheart. He thinks he is the father of little Jim. He said

only this morning, 'Don't he look like me?' and I assured him he did. Come tomorrow."

Then I heard something that wasn't talking, nor laughing, nor crying, nor no sound except kissing. I didn't know priests were such blame good kissers.

Father Roux says he's for charity bazaars, they're a great institution. I'm fer them, too—pretty ladies and all.

CHAPTER X

A Peck of Bones

Saint Peter,

Infallible First Pope:

Since I wrote the first letter to you I've been learning lots in school. First, I've been learning about His Holiness, the Pope. He has a heap of names—enough to call him a fresh one every day for a month, so they tell. The Pope used to be chief cook and bottle washer of the whole creation. He had millions of soldiers and when he told them to get a move on themselves, they got. He cleaned up with all the nations of the earth and all earthly rulers and Princes and Kings tumbled over themselves to run errands for him, and do anything else he said. So well trained were they that when he said, "Stand on your head," they stood. When he said "Jump through the hoop," they jumped. When he said, "Come on with your Peter's Pence," they came.

And this was as God intended and God wuz well pleased. You can see how this would be, the God being the Pope and the Pope being God. It couldn't be no other way.

But after a while the devil came butting in.

His name wuz Luther. How he ever got nerve enough to go up against God on Earth is more than I know, but he did. He bucked right square up against God on Earth and since that evil day the Vicegerant of God has been having hard luck.

As long as His Holiness wuz at the head of everything he didn't let anybody go to school except a few rich. There wasn't any schools to go to and he wouldn't use none of his good coin setting up schools. Schools is not a good thing unless they happen to be Parochial. Schools, as like as not, set folks thinking, and folks that think are the most pestiferous and troublesome folks on earth. That's the reason the Church don't encourage schools. The Church does the thinking for everybody in it. So it wuz that when that man Luther bucked up against the Church, there wuzn't any school except them the Pope wuz using for the Church.

Martin Luther stirred up an awful fuss. Folks says, "What's it all about?" and before anybody knew what wuz happening some printing presses got loosened up and folks began reading and thinking for themselves. It wuz an awful shame that it had to happen and has made a rocky path for the feet of God-on-Earth.

Sister Clementina Carmel says persecution has been heaped on the head of Holy Mother Church ever since that sinful priest Luther backslid. And she says the crowning infamy of it all is that a Jew—just like you used to be—is mayor of the city where the Pope's vatican is.

The Vatican is a big palace of thousands of rooms where God keeps his diamonds and gold plate and jewelled crowns and robes and paintings and statutory locked up so none of the poor that's starving just outside the gates can break in and steal a few cents worth. Sister Clementina Carmel gets riled up when she thinks of the Jew mayor. I don't see why though. The Blessed Holy Virgin was a Jew. So was Saint Joseph, her Spouse, and so wuz her Son. And so wuz you and by the way His Holiness the Pope holds on to what he's got, he's a Jew hisself.

But I started to tell what I've learned in Parochial. I've been learning history. Sister Agatha says all that what I learned in Free School wuz wrong. She says the tree of liberty wuz planted on American soil by Catholics. This country wuz discovered by a Catholic who wuz furnished with funds by a Catholic queen and blessed by a Catholic Pope. The signers of the Declaration

of Independence wuz all Catholics but one. New York never had any liberty till Catholics got in a Governor and Maryland wuz the first to grant civil and religious liberty. She says George Washington was called the father of his country but he got his good ideas from Lafayette, who wuz a Catholic.

Father Alphonsus says its a shame the way history is taught in Free Schools and that the time is coming when there won't be no more Free Schools to poison the minds of the coming generations.

Sister Clementina Carmel asked him if he thought Catholics wuz going to have to fight with guns for their right to Parochial schools. He says they're hoping to "undermine" the Free Schools. I don't know what sort of an undermine the Church uses to blow up things like Free Schools. I suppose its something like these mines they use to blow up ships.

I've learned more than this I've told but I can't take time to tell it. I want to ask you to look up Saint Joseph and see with your own eyes what kind of an animal he is. The image on our shelf looks like a human. But there's a mistake somewhere and Maw is madder than a wet hen and she's about to have it out with Father

Roux. If he hadn't been drunk the day Maw got her toe-bone of St. Joseph, she's had it out then.

You see Maw and all of us, pinched along all winter saving up for the toe-bone, guaranteed by Father Roux to be the best relic ever sent out on account of being so few of them.

Just before we got ourn I asked Sister Agatha how many bones wuz in a man's foot. She said she wasn't no doctor. I told her at Free School they taught bones. She said I wasn't never to tell her nothing more about what they did at Free School. She didn't see the need of studying about bones unless it wuz saints' bones. Then I asked her how many bones wuz in a saint's foot. She said as many as wuz in his foot when he wuz a man.

I couldn't get from this information the exact number, but by feeling my own foot I figgered out there might be twenty.

We got our bone just before Easter. Maw wuz so proud she cleaned up and invited everybody in to see it. Mary McGraw come first. She come grinning and said she had a surprise. She had a bone of the big toe of Saint Joseph. Then come two women from down stairs. They had bones from the toe of Saint Joseph. Then come

three women from across the street and five from down the alley. They all had bones from Saint Joseph's toe.

"Howly Angels and Christ!" says Maw, madder than thunder, "how many toe-bones did Saint Joseph have?"

"Put them on the floor and let's count," says I.

So we put them on the floor, two by two and two by two as long as the bones kept coming in until we had something built out a yard long, and Maw and all other ladies getting madder and madder every minute.

When the last bone wuz set in place Maw wuz past the point of speech.

"Looks like a thousand-legged worm," says I. "Saint Joseph must have been one of them things that stood on his hind legs and eat tops out of trees. Miss Hattie told us about them in Free School. They all died off before we got here. But then so did Saint Joseph. How do we know what kind he wuz?"

"Michael, my son," says Maw, "I don't know what sort of baste you're spaking of, but you go fetch His Riv'rence. 'Twasn't the fut of no evil baste that sthood on his back legs to eat grass off the tree tous I've stharved meself these

months. Git, me son Michael, and fetch the praste."

I didn't lose no time. The housekeeper at Father Roux opened a crack in the door and told me the holy father wuz sick.

But Beany Buck that lived across the street says he seen him going in tanked just a few minutes before.

The bones wuz gathered into a basket. Maw said they wuz a peck of them.

CHAPTER XI

"Private"

Saint Peter,

Decent and Respected Sir:

I've marked this letter "Private" so you'll not leave it laying around where any of the lady angels will get it. It might be embarrassing and what angels don't know, don't hurt them.

Before I get into the part that wouldn't be lady-like for your girl angels, I'll tell how Father Roux straightened things out with Maw. When he seen the basket of bones and all the mad women he said there wuz a mistake. He said them bones in the basket wuz not the bones he had ordered from Rome. He said them bones wuz going to a menagerie somewhere and it wuz all the fault of the Express Company. He said he'd get a tracer right out after the real bones and if they shouldn't never be found he promised Maw a Miraculous Medal with "Hi coculorum" inscribed on it and specially blessed by His Holiness the Pope. Whoever says the words on this medal and wears it can do anything even to moving mountains or turning them into men.

Maw said she didn't want no medal to turn anything into a man. She said she had more man now then she wanted. She'd like to have a medal that would turn a pot of soup into a decent stew.

This wuz the way they patched up.

Next thing that come wuz Easter. Father Roux had Mass and the rest of the Church doings and cleaned up with a pocket full of money for there wuz four hundred to Mass and Masses is always paid for.

Some folks thinks priests aint human no more after they take holy orders. But if they could see some of them at Mulginty's they wouldn't doubt they wuz human. Back of Mulginty's there's a room what's shut off what folks drink in. It's in this room I've seen the holy fathers act like any other humans and it wuz here a few of them celebrated the night after Easter and blowed in some of their Mass money.

Paw'd been getting himself ready for another beating and Maw sent me out to see if I could bring him in before he'd spent his last cent. She said if he come in stewed she'd beat him to a frazzle and she wuz too tired to start it unless she had to.

It wuz when I wuz looking for Paw I found

the priests having their celebration in the back room. I didn't get there to see the start and they wouldn't have let me in anyhow. But by this time they wouldn't have cared who looked in. There wuz four of them. Father Roux and the father that talked to the lady in the dark house wuz dancing together to beat the band. They wuz singing and wuz both drunk as boiled owls. Father Alphonsis was lying across the table trying to laugh, and another one wuz sitting asleep in a big chair.

I don't know what sort of drinks you heavenly priests get. Maybe you that's been Popes get fine goods like our Bishops and Archbishops do. Maybe you like beer. Beer's the best because a man can drink the most of it. He can pour in and pour in until he's running over. This wuz what these holy fathers had been drinking and there wuz two rows of empty bottles standing along the wall. All of them priests wuz full to running over and after they'd danced a while, Father Roux got one of the empty bottles. What he done I'm not saying. Then he danced a little more and got another empty bottle. The priest that kissed the lady in the dark house got one, too. Then they danced a few more turns, but they wuz getting wobblety now. Father Alphon-

sus wuz sound asleep, snoring like a hog and beer leaking out his mouth and down onto the table. Father Roux tried to tickle him awake, but he only grunted. Then Father Roux and the Father that loved the pretty lady, got some of the beer bottles what had been empty but wasn't empty now, up on the table and wuz going to play a joke on Father Alphonsus when the man that run the place come snorting in cussing.

"Drop it," he says to Father Roux who wuz holding up one of the bottles. "You don't pull off no such dirty stunt as that at Mulginty's. And its ashamed you should be if you are priests —ashamed," and jawing and cussing he threw the bottles out the back door.

Father Roux said he wuz covered with shame and he sung a piece of the Mass and crossed himself and kissed the table.

I didn't stay to see it out. I had to go on looking for Paw.

Now what I want to say is this. A man ought to be let to have his innocent amusement without being snitched on. But Sister Clementina Carmel says priests is the representatives on earth of the Son of the Blessed Virgin. I haven't heard half as much about the Son as I have his Maw. But from what little I've heard He is a

decent and honorable gentleman and its no part of a square deal for a priest or anybody else to be representing him like Father Roux does. If it wasn't for his lying and his grafting and his boozing and his low-down ways of taking his amusements and his habits of getting fresh with young girls, he might be alright.

He is on his way to heaven and there aint no way of heading him off. He's taken holy orders in the Infallible Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against him.

But take a tip from Mikey. Keep him off the streets when he's full of beer or he'll disgrace you and some Angel cop will have to lock him up. Then don't let your girl angels go to his confession. If he has to confess females of any kind, give him Mary Magdalene and Saint Anastasia. They've had some experience with holy fathers and may be able to protect themselves, or maybe they're so old by now they wouldn't be no temptation to no priest.

P. S. Maw give Paw a dreadful jawing last night and told him to look for another place to sponge, she's done with him. Paw told Maw she wuz turning into a Suffragette and it wuz a mortal sin to be one of them things. He said Father Roux told him so and said a woman's

place wuz at the tub and the man wuz the head of the family. Maw told Paw if he didn't move on the head of the Rooney family would be busted before the next five minutes. Maw's been keeping an account of indulgences and she says Paddy and Nora has been celebrating in heaven for a week as near as she can get at it. If you see the Rooneys—you'll know Nora by having one eye bigger than the other and a mole on her left leg and Paddy'll be holding to her—tell them we send love and would have starved on all summer rather than left them in Purgatory. Poor things!

CHAPTER XII

Aggie and His Riverance Mix

Saint Peter

Vicar of Christ (ex.):

The last time Father Roux called on us Rooneys there wuz fireworks to pay.

Father Roux hadn't never got Aggie out of his mind and wuz still hankering to be her spiritual advisor and tell her about it in the confessional box and when he seen her out with Big Blue his desire to protect Aggie got the better of him and he called on Maw.

"Mrs. Rooney" says he, "I've come again to talk to you about that girl of yourn. She's a virtuous and lovely young woman what's going to be ruined unless something's done. I have been thinking of her case prayerfully and I would suggest putting her in the House of the Good Shepherd for a time of training and then letting her have a vocation—holy orders.

"Aggie's getting' along fairly dacent," says Maw.

"How little you know of the world, my good daughter, and its wicked ways and snares for

young girls. Who is this big policeman? Is he a True Son of the Church?"

"I don't know," says Maw, "but Aggie she knows."

"That's it. You don't know. Well, I'll tell you, he aint keeping company with your Aggie for no good and you better put her in the House of the Good Shepherd or some other safe institution of Mother Church before the harm is done."

I seen Maw was getting scared or riled one. I didn't know which it wuz and before she opened her mouth Aggie herself come in. When she seen His Rivernce she stopped and stared. Then she says to Maw, "What you got that blackguard in here for?"

Father Roux blowed out a little in front and Maw looked nervous and whispered, "Aggie—Aggie, he's a howly father!"

"Howly nothing!" said Aggie turning up her nose, "holy nothing! What's the booze drinking faker doing here again!"

"Now, darlin'," says Maw gentle like, "don't fly to pieces and get cuttin' up. He's bin thinkin' about you, he has, darlin,' and he's deciding you need a vocation."

"Vocation? And aint it vocation enough to

earn my living like an honest woman and help a bit with the kids and the rent? What else would he have me do?"

"He says—now don't fly up, darlin', and cut up none—he says you're about to be led asthray and he'll git you a nice aisy job in one of thim Houses of the Good Shepherd."

"One of them jails what does swet house work? None of that for me, for wasn't it Katy Barnett that was in one of them jails for six years? Fifteen she was when her mother died and they took her to the H. O. G. S. She wanted to get out, poor thing, but she never did until she was eighteen and over. And then with one dress to her back and an old coat that come from the charity box. And all that time she was making overalls and shirts. If its to jail I want to go I'll pick me one where cops can look in once in a while to see if I'm dead or alive and not one of these here what nobody sees the inside of but fakirs like this here one. So now," says Aggie to His Riverence, "if you've had your say, you've had your answer and your company's not needed no more."

"Disrespect! Impudence! Sacrilege to thus address a priest of the True Church," says Father Roux making a step toward Aggie.

Then she got mad. A red spot come flashing onto her cheek and her eyes got fiery.

"Don't you touch me!" ste yelled. "Have you forgotten what I did for you at confessional?"

Then the Holy Father got mad. "Wretched girl!" he said choking like. "Wretched girl! How dare you mention it! How dare you?"

"Keep your distance" says Aggie. "I dare mention it. And more I dare do it again only next time I'll scratch the snakey eyes out of you! You evil beast! Blowing your stinking breath in my face and trying to force your drunken love-making on a girl what come in to get her sins forgiven!"

"The Saints and holy angels!" Maw cried. "What terrible thing is this yer tellin'? What hev ye bin doing' to the howly father?"

"I slapped his face, I did, and 'twas a small part of what he was deserving, the dirty devil."

"Stop! Silence!" shouted Father Roux. "I am a priest of the Holy Catholic Church."

"And does priests of the Holy Catholic Church take it upon themselves to ask questions thet's none of their business to respectable girls? Is it a part of their business to speak of such things as no decent man speaks of? Is it a part of their business to try to ruin the character of an

honest girl when she comes into the confessional to get her sins forgiven? If this here is what priests is at in the confessional they're a bad lot and the cops should break up their rotten business. Now stay where you are—don't come no nearer to me. You got your dirty hands on me in confessional you did, but I didn't know you then. I know you now, you sneaking devil in long-tailed coat and cross. But you didn't do what you was trying to—did you? And I didn't have a fair show then. Next time—if ye try it again, I'll clean you up till you won't know what's gone with you—you skunk!"

"Enough, apostate!" he said hoarsely. "By this sacred emblem of my authority I'll put a curse upon you," and he held out his cross.

Quick as a cat Aggie grabbed up the broom and stood holding it at him. "And by this here emblem," she says, "I'll put worse than a curse on you. I'll black your eye and uncouple your spine and dint your bull-head, you holy devil of a father!"

For a minute Aggie and His Riverence stood there looking like two cats ready for wool-pulling. While they wuz standing Big Blue come up the stairs and stopped in the door.

"What's this?" he says, surprised like.

"Its a holy father fixing to put a curse on me because I slapped him till he saw stars when he tried to get fresh with me in confessional."

"But he's a priest!" says Big Blue.

"You mean he looks like a priest. What he is underneath the cover of his long-tailed coats and petticoats you don't know but I know. I've been in the confessional with him. Take it from Aggie, Blue dear, he looks like a he-angel—maybe, but looks is deceiving. And not content with the answer I've already give him he's come butting in here saying I ought to be put in an institution and you and me fixing to marry next month."

"Marry!" exclaimed Father Roux. "Marry next month! It will take many months of penance to get you ready for the holy sacrament of matrimony. And until then there can be no marriage."

"Ah, come now," says Aggie. "Do you think you're the only pebble on the beach? There are others."

"But there is no priest of the Holy Church anywhere who will give you the sacrament of matrimony until your sin of—your terrible sin of insulting a priest has been atoned."

"Don't let it worry you" says Aggie. "There's

a Justice around the block that can tie the knot as tight as any priest can do."

"A Justice?" Father Roux exclaimed. "A Justice cannot marry you. There is no marriage outside of the Roman Catholic Church. And if you go through any other so-called marriage—it is not marriage. It cannot be. If you sir," and he turned to Big Blue, "if you marry this bad and wretched girl outside the Holy Catholic Church your marriage will be no marriage. She will be no more than a common woman of the street and your children will be bastards."

When Maw heard this last word she gave a dreadful scream and said the word over two or three times and then wilted into a chair.

"Stop!" says Big Blue. "You're wearing the cloth and I don't want no scene here. But you've said enough. You move on now or I'll be compelled to run you in for disturbing the peace—move on. This here's America we're in. You're mixed up. You think you're in South America or Mexico or living back in the dark ages. You priests are all right in your place, but don't try to run our civil affairs. Keep to your religion."

"So we do keep to religion. Matrimony is a holy sacrament and there is no marriage outside the Roman Catholic Church and only curses

can come upon those that defy Church authority—only courses," and His Riverence raised his cross and got ready again to say his curse.

"Move on," says Big Blue touching him on the shoulder with his big club.

"Say, Bluey darlin'," says Aggie, putting her arms around him, "Let the holy devil of a father say his curse. It's in his system and he's not going to be comfortable no more till its out." And to His Riverence she says, "Go on with your curses. Curses, like chickens, get home to roost. Nobody here's afraid of them."

For a minute Aggie stood with her arms around Big Blue. They wuz standing in front of His Riverence waiting to get cursed. Then Big Blue busted out laughing fit to kill and His Riverence went off down stairs. I suppose he give us our cursing when he got out in front of the house.

When he wuz gone and Big Blue had quieted down he said, "Mrs. Rooney, I dropped in to tell you I'm wanting to marry your little Aggie Rooney. We've got us a nice little flat picked out and my income's enough so's I can have a bit left over to help you and the kids. But there's conditions. Don't have these priests on your string. You don't need them in your busi-

ness. You're working hard enough for yourself and the little ones without taking care of them. Let them hustle for themselves. Then about Mikey, Mikey's got the making of a man in him. Put him back in Free School. Free School's the place for Mikey."

Maw said she wuz willing, especially since Paddy and Nora is out of Purgatory. So I'm going back to study about George Washington and the Stars and Stripes is going back where St. Joseph has been standing. He's cracked anyway."

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